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Max Holland Spins the Progressive Press

By Jim DiEugenio

It is relatively easy to understand why, 35 years after the fact, the mainstream media continues its shameful cover-up of the assassinations of the sixties. What is less easy to explain is why some of the alleged "alternative media" do the same. Consider the case of Max Holland. We have reported on some of Holland's past activities in previous issues (see the Notebook section in Vol. 4 No. 2 and the article "The Review Board's Public Comments" in Vol. 5 No. 2). But he has reappeared in the last few months to spin his version of what the ARRB really did achieve. Holland's mission has clearly been to neutralize any aftereffects of Oliver Stone's *JFK*. This mission has turned him into a triathlete regarding the Kennedy assassination. His agenda includes the Mission Impossible assignment of rehabilitating the Warren Commission, ridiculing anyone who disbelieves the lone nut scenario as a fringe character and attacking the brothers Kennedy as being overrated, sentimentalized politicians who don't deserve to be grieved over. It is interesting that Holland's upcoming book on the Warren Commission is reportedly being released by Random House. Gerald Posner's twin whitewashes of the JFK and MLK cases were both released by that publishing house. And we know that Random House executive Robert Loomis has been a career godfather to both Posner and Seymour Hersh. (For a full discussion of Loomis' agenda concerning the assassinations, see the long piece about Hersh in Vol. 5 No. 1.)

The *Boston Globe* is serving as a public relations machine for Holland's book. The *Globe* used to be a fairly independent paper before it was purchased by the *New York Times*. Since then the line on both the Kennedys and the assassinations has notably changed. On December 8th, the *Globe* ran a puff piece about Holland which serves as a preview for his book. The book carries the (apparently) non-satirical title, *A Need to Know*. The quality of Holland's mind and his skepticism about anecdotal evidence is illustrated throughout. The best example is a vignette included about John Connally's powerful testimony in which he strongly denied being hit by the same shot as Kennedy. Holland states that "Connally's ego was so oversized" that he couldn't accept the idea of being hit by the same bullet that hit Kennedy. Holland says that Connally visited the Warren Commission offices in a huff insisting, "I want my own bullet, and I'm going to get it." Funny, to my knowledge this incredible story never circulated while Connally was alive and around to dismiss it. The fact that Holland accepts it at face value tells us all we need to know

about his upcoming tract.

Yet, the editors of *The Nation* do not listen to that story with tongue-in-cheek. Over the years, they have regularly printed Holland's columns. Of course, as Marty Schotz has pointed out, that magazine actually endorsed the Warren Report in rather unqualified terms in 1964. In 1992 they allowed Alexander Cockburn a platform for his politically motivated rants against Stone and John Newman. (With the new declassified record on Vietnam, Cockburn owes both men an apology, which they will not get.) A year ago, Cockburn wrote an astonishing panegyric for Hersh's conduct in the tawdry JFK/Marilyn Monroe phony "blackmail" documents affair. All this was bad enough when *The Nation* was run by former *New York Times* editor Victor Navasky. It is less understandable now that Navasky has been kicked upstairs by the new ownership team headed by Katrina Vanden Heuvel. From what we can gather, Vanden Heuvel is the daughter of William Vanden Heuvel who worked for RFK after President Kennedy's assassination. He then wrote a touching book about his years with Bobby Kennedy entitled *On His Own*. The book is quite moving in spots, especially when it discusses RFK's decision to stay in politics only when he realized what his brother's example had signified to millions around the world. If Vanden Heuvel senior is still around, I can't help but wonder how he feels about his daughter allowing the likes of Max Holland to desecrate his friend's name in her publication.

In the December 7th issue of *The Nation*, Holland wrote a wrap-up piece on the Board. In it he (sketchily) outlined the Board's work, blasted Stone, blasted Arthur Schlesinger, blasted the Kennedys, blasted Jim Garrison, and then reviewed four books. No surprise, according to Holland, all four books say Oswald did it. But not even that is enough for Holland. Two of the books say that Oswald may have been the trigger man for a mini-conspiracy. So those two books get negative reviews. In the discussion, Holland recommends three books of "lasting value" on the assassination: William Manchester's *The Death of a President*, Priscilla McMillan's *Marina and Lee*, and Norman Mailer's *Oswald's Tale*. All of those books say Oswald did it. There was not one word about any of the bombshell documents released by the Board.

Informing the public about important new evidence in the murder of a former president is not a high priority with Pacifica Radio host Marc Cooper either. Cooper, who is now the major host at the Pacifica outlet in Los Angeles (KPFFK), liked Holland's article and invited him on his show for December 2nd. Surprisingly, Cooper did not know the ARRB existed until he read Holland's article. That means he didn't know

about it until it was over. This indicates what his level of interest and knowledge about the JFK case is. Cooper did not challenge one assertion in the article about the epidemic of lone nut murders in Dallas that fateful weekend: Kennedy, Tippit, and Oswald. Neither Holland's bona fides nor his clear bias were ever addressed. But that is no surprise since, a few months earlier, Cooper and his producer Barbara Osborn invited Gerald Posner on to discuss his book on the King case. In the Posner spot, Cooper did not raise an eyebrow or intone one skeptical comment.

Quite naturally, Cooper is a contributing editor for *The Nation*. He also hosts the syndicated program *Radio Nation*. One guest he has on regularly is that magazine's Washington correspondent David Corn. Corn wrote a limited hangout volume on CIA officer Ted Shackley a few years back which whitewashed the CIA's role in the drug trade from Indochina. Corn also attacked Gary Webb in 1996 when his articles on the CIA drug trade in Central America created such a ruckus. Corn recently told journalist Bob Parry that he wanted to be the "left version of the conventional wisdom." Need we add that when it comes to the awful scandals that have rocked America since 1963 there is no 'left version' or 'right version'; and the conventional wisdom on all of them has always been wrong. There is simply the truth. Sometimes the truth turns out to be radical and therefore unwelcome to all parts of the establishment. That is where the spin control doctors come in. What Cooper, Corn, and Vanden Heuvel do not understand is that a large part of the public realizes this. The issue of widespread, endemic political corruption—which goes beyond just campaign finance reform—and the public revulsion toward it is a *potentially* oceanic force. (One only has to recall the 1992 phenomena of Ross Perot and Jerry Brown.) That is why the power elite needs this phony left-right dichotomy on things like the CIA and drugs, Watergate, Iran/Contra, and the assassinations. Pundits like Corn, Cockburn and Noam Chomsky are propagandists on one side of the political establishment who are just as dishonest and crowd-playing as people like Bill Buckley and George Will on the right. But the propaganda allows the former to be featured in the "progressive press" like *The Nation* and *S* Magazine. That cavalier attitude is one of the reasons why there is no organized progressive movement today. And that common bond allows the 'liberal' Cooper to shake hands with his thoroughly establishment pal Max Holland. ♦